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A second dimension of relationship meaning is liking, or affection. This concerns the degree of positive or negative feeling that is communicated. Although liking may seem synonymous with responsiveness, the two are actually distinct. We may be responsive to people we don't like but to whom we must pay attention. We may also be responsive by glaring or scowling, which indicate we are attentive to the other person but we are not affectionate. We communicate that we like or dislike others by what we actually say as well as by tone of voice, facial expressions, how close we sit to them, and so forth.

Power, or control, is the third dimension of relationship meaning. This refers to the power balance between communicators. Friends and romantic partners sometimes engage in covert power struggles on the relationship level. One person suggests going to a particular movie and then to dinner at the pizza parlor. The other responds by saying he or she doesn't want to see that movie and isn't in the mood for pizza. They could be arguing on the content level about their different preferences for the evening. If arguments over what to do or eat are recurrent, however, chances are the couple is negotiating power—who gets to decide where to go and what to do. In many relationships, power is imbalanced: teacher–student, parent–child, coach–athlete, and so forth. Usually both people in relationships like these accept the power imbalance as appropriate, but sometimes the person who has less power challenges the person who has more. For instance, a student may question a teacher's authority, and a player may argue with a coach's instructions.

Thus far, we have seen that communication exists on a continuum, ranging from impersonal to interpersonal. We've also defined interpersonal communication as a selective, systemic process that allows people to build personal knowledge of one another and to create meanings. Meanings, we have seen, reflect histories of all interactions and involve both content and relationship levels. To further clarify the nature of interpersonal communication, we'll first discuss three efforts to model the communication process.

MODELS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

A **model** is a representation of a phenomenon such as an airplane, a house, or human communication. Models show how a phenomenon works. Early models of interpersonal communication were simplistic, so we will discuss them very briefly. We'll look more closely at a current model that offers sophisticated insight into the process of interpersonal communication.

Linear Models

The first model of interpersonal communication (Lasswell, 1948) depicted communication as a linear, or one-way, process in which one person acts on another person. This was a verbal model that consisted of five questions describing a sequence of acts that make up communication:

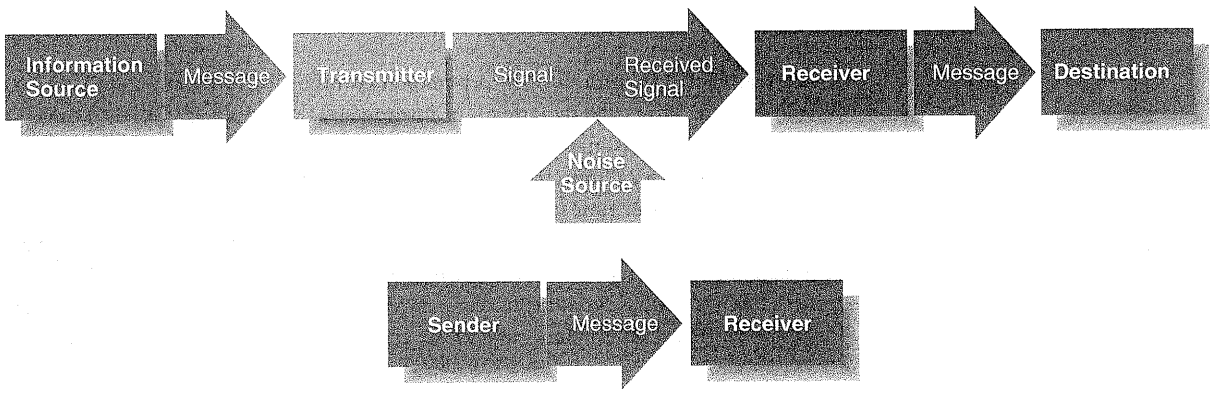
Who?
Says what?
In what channel?
To whom?
With what effect?

A year later, Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver (1949) offered a revised model that added the feature of noise. Earlier in this chapter, we noted that noise is anything that interferes with communication. Noise might be spam in online communication, regional accents, or background conversations in the workplace. (Figure 1.3 shows Shannon and Weaver's model.)

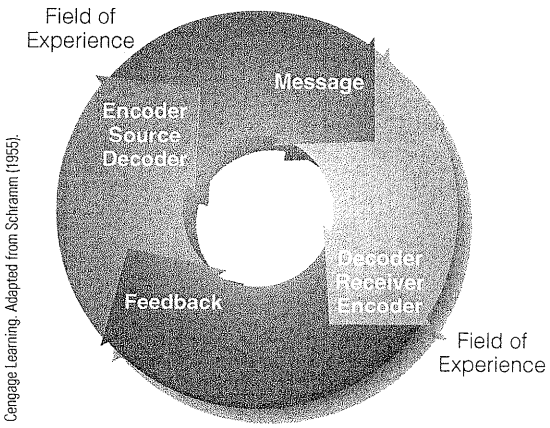
These early **linear models** had serious shortcomings. They portrayed communication as flowing in only one direction—from a sender to a passive receiver. This implies that listeners never send messages and that they absorb only passively what speakers say. But this isn't how communication really occurs. Listeners nod, frown, smile, look bored or interested, and so forth, and they actively work to make sense of others' messages. Further, different cultures place distinct emphases on speaking and listening. East Asians place greater emphasis on the receiver's responsibilities than Western cultures (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2015). Linear models also erred by representing communication as a sequence of actions in which one step (listening) follows an earlier step (talking). In actual interaction, however, speaking and listening often occur simultaneously or they overlap. On the job, coworkers exchange ideas, and each listens and responds as one person speaks; those who are speaking are also listening for cues from others. Online, as we compose our messages, instant messages (IMs) pop up on our screens. At any moment in

Figure 1.3

The Linear Model of Communication



Cengage Learning. Adapted from Shannon and Weaver, (1949).



Cengage Learning. Adapted from Schramm (1955).

Figure 1.4

The Interactive Model of Communication

the process of interpersonal communication, participants are simultaneously sending and receiving messages and adapting to one another.

Interactive Models

Interactive models portrayed communication as a process in which listeners give **feedback**, which is a response to a message. In addition, interactive models recognize that communicators create and interpret messages within personal fields of experience (see Figure 1.4). The more communicators' fields of experience overlap, the better they can understand each other. When fields of experience don't overlap enough, misunderstandings may occur. Madison's commentary gives an example of this type of misunderstanding.

I studied abroad last year. For the first couple of weeks that I was in Germany, I thought Germans were the rudest people I'd ever met. They aren't friendly with small talk and saying hello; they push and bump into others and don't apologize. After I got to know some Germans, I realized they are very nice, but they have different social norms than Americans—especially Americans from the South!

Although the interactive model is an improvement over the linear model, it still portrays communication as a sequential process in which one person is a sender and another is a receiver. In reality, everyone who is involved in communication both sends and receives messages. Interactive models also fail to capture the dynamic nature of interpersonal communication and the ways it changes over time. For example, two people communicate more openly after months of exchanging email messages than they did the first time they met in a chat room. Two coworkers communicate more easily and effectively after months of working together on a project team.

Transactional Models

The **transactional model** of interpersonal communication is more accurate because it emphasizes the dynamism of interpersonal communication and the multiple roles people assume during the process. In addition, this model includes the feature of time to call our attention to the fact that messages, noise, and fields of experience vary over time (see Figure 1.5).

The transactional model recognizes that noise is present throughout interpersonal communication. In addition, this model includes the feature of time to remind us that people's communication varies over time. Each communicator's field of experience, and the shared field of experience between communicators, changes

over time. As we encounter new people and have new experiences that broaden our outlooks, we change how we interact with others. As we get to know others over time, relationships may become more informal and intimate. For example, people who meet online sometimes decide to get together face-to-face (f2f), and a serious friendship or romance may develop.

The transactional model also makes it clear that communication occurs within systems that affect what and how people communicate and what meanings are created. Those systems, or contexts, include the shared systems of both communicators (shared social networking sites, campus, town, workplace, religion, social groups, or culture) and the personal systems of each person (family, religious association, friends).

Finally, we should emphasize that the transactional model doesn't label one person a sender and the other a receiver. Instead, both people are defined as communicators who participate equally and often simultaneously in the communication process. This means that, at a given moment in communication, you may be sending a message (speaking or nodding your head), receiving a message, or doing both at the same time (interpreting what someone says while nodding to show you are interested).

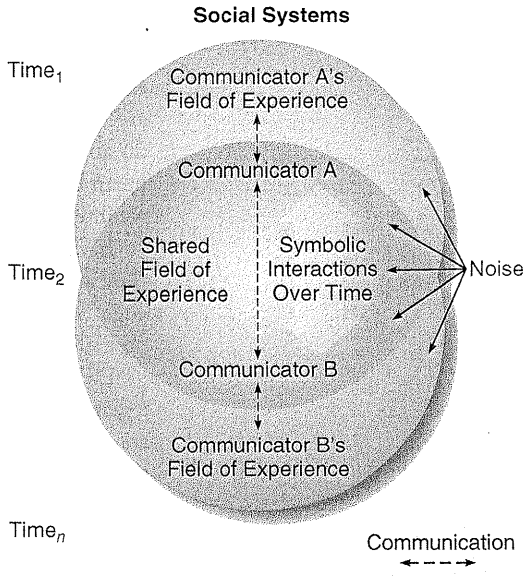


Figure 1.5

The Transactional Model of Communication

The transactional nature of interpersonal communication implies that communicators share responsibility for effectiveness. People often say, "You didn't express yourself clearly," or "You misunderstood me," as if understanding rested with a single person. In reality, responsibility for good communication is shared. One person cannot make communication successful, nor is one person totally responsible for problems. Misunderstandings often arise in email and online communication because feedback tends to be delayed, a problem that instant messaging can decrease. Another limitation of online communication is the inability to convey inflection and nonverbal behaviors, such as winks, that tell another person we are joking. Sometimes we add emoticons—such as :) or :(— to signal emotions online. Because interpersonal communication is an ongoing, transactional process, all participants share responsibility for its effectiveness.

We're now ready to consider the principles implied by how we have defined and modeled interpersonal communication.

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

There are eight basic principles for effectiveness in interpersonal communication.

Principle 1: We Cannot *Not* Communicate

A key principle to keep in mind is that we cannot avoid communicating when we are with others because they interpret what we do and say as well as what we don't do and don't say. Even if we choose to be silent, we're communicating. What we mean by silence and how others interpret it depend on the systems within which we interact.

Because Westerners typically are more verbal than many other cultural groups, they are likely to regard silence as a signal of anger, disinterest, or lack of knowledge. Some Native Americans and members of many Eastern cultures might interpret silence as thoughtfulness or respect. Either way, silence communicates.

Even when we don't intend to communicate, we do so. We may be unaware of a grimace that gives away our disapproval or an eye roll that shows we disrespect someone, but we are communicating nonetheless. Unconscious communication often occurs on the relationship level of meaning as we express feelings about others through subtle, often nonverbal communication. Regardless of whether we aim to communicate and whether others understand our intentions, we continuously, unavoidably communicate.

Principle 2: Interpersonal Communication Is Irreversible

Perhaps you have been in a heated argument in which you lost your temper and said something you later regretted. It could be that you hurt someone or revealed something about yourself that you meant to keep private. Later, you might have tried to repair the damage by apologizing, explaining what you said, or denying what you revealed. But you couldn't erase your communication; you couldn't unsay what you had said.

You may have had similar experiences when texting or posting online. Perhaps you read a message that made you angry, and you dashed off a barbed reply, sent it, and then wished you could unsend it. Perhaps you posted a picture of yourself when you were not sober, and your parents saw it. The fact that communication is irreversible reminds us that what we say and do matters. It has impact. Once we communicate with others, our words become part of the relationship. Remembering this principle keeps us aware of the importance of choosing when to communicate and what to say—or not to say!

Principle 3: Interpersonal Communication Involves Ethical Choices

Ethics is the branch of philosophy that focuses on moral principles and codes of conduct. Ethical issues concern right and wrong. Because interpersonal communication is irreversible and affects others, it always has ethical implications. What we say and do affects others: how they feel, how they perceive themselves, how they

think about themselves, and how they think about others. Thus, responsible people think carefully about ethical implications of their communication.

Our everyday lives are filled with ethical choices. Should you not tell someone something that might make him or her less willing to do what you want? If you read a message on your social network that makes you angry, do you fire off a nasty reply, assuming that you will never meet the person and so won't face any consequences? Do you judge another person's communication from your personal perspective and experience, or do you try to understand his or her communication on his or her terms and from his or her perspective? In work settings, should you avoid giving negative feedback because it could hurt others' feelings even if it might help them advance? In these and many other instances, we face ethical choices. Throughout this book, we note ethical issues that arise when we interact with others. As you read, consider what kinds of choices you make and what moral principles guide your choices.

Principle 4: People Construct Meanings in Interpersonal Communication

The significance of communication doesn't lie in words and nonverbal behaviors. Instead, meaning arises out of how we interpret communication. This calls our attention to the fact that humans use symbols, which sets us apart from other creatures.

As we will see in Chapter 4, **symbols**, such as words, have no inherent or true meanings. Instead, we must interpret them. What does it mean if someone says, "You're sick"? To interpret the comment, you must consider the context (a counseling session, a professional meeting, following a daredevil stunt), who said it (a psychiatrist, a supervisor, a subordinate, a friend, an enemy), and the words themselves, which may mean various things (a medical diagnosis, a challenge to your professional competence, a compliment on your zaniness, disapproval).

In close relationships, partners gradually coordinate meanings so that they share understandings of issues and feelings important to their connection. When a relationship begins, one person may regard confrontation as healthy, and the other may avoid arguments. Over time, partners come to share meanings for conflict—what it is, how to handle it, and whether it threatens the relationship or is a path to growth.

The meanings we attribute to conflict are shaped by cultural backgrounds. Because standing up for your own ideas is emphasized in the United States, many people who were born and raised in this country value confrontation more than do many Asians who were raised in traditional Asian families. Conflict means different things to each group.

Even one person's meanings vary over time and in response to experiences and moods. If you're in a good mood, a playful gibe might strike you as funny or as an invitation to banter. The same remark might hurt or anger you if you're feeling down. The meaning of the gibe, like all communication, is not preset or absolute. Meanings are created by people as they communicate in specific contexts.

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Principle 5: Metacommunication Affects Meanings

The word *metacommunication* comes from the prefix *meta*, meaning "about," and the root word *communication*. Thus, **metacommunication** is communication about communication. For example, during a conversation with your friend Pat, you notice that Pat's body seems tense and her voice is sharp. You might say, "You seem really stressed in our conversation." Your statement is metacommunication because it communicates about Pat's nonverbal communication.

We can use words to talk about other words or nonverbal behaviors. If an argument between Joe and Marc gets out of hand, and Joe makes a nasty personal attack, Joe might later say, "I didn't really mean what I just said. I was just so angry it came out." This metacommunication may soften the hurt caused by the attack. If Joe and Marc then have a productive conversation about their differences, Marc might conclude by saying, "This has really been a good talk. I think we understand each other a lot better now." This comment verbally metacommunicates about the conversation that preceded it.

Metacommunication can increase understanding. For instance, teachers sometimes say, "The next point is really important." This comment signals students to pay special attention to what follows. A parent might tell a child, "What I said may sound harsh, but I'm only telling you because I care about you." The comment tells the child how to interpret a critical message. A manager tells a subordinate to take a comment seriously by saying, "I really mean what I said. I'm not kidding." On the other hand, if we're not really sure what we think about an issue, and we want to try out a stance, we might say, "I'm thinking this through as I go, and I'm not really wedded to this position, but what I tend to believe right now is . . . ." This preface to your statement tells listeners not to assume that what you say is set in stone.

We can also metacommunicate to check on understanding: "Was I clear?" "Do you see why I feel like I do?" "Can you see why I'm confused about the problem?" Questions such as these allow you to find out whether another person understands what you intend to communicate. You may also metacommunicate to find out whether you understand what another person expresses to you. "What I think you meant is that you are worried. Is that right?" "If I follow what you said, you feel trapped between what you want to do and what your parents want you to do. Is that what you were telling me?" You may even say, "I don't understand what you just told me. Can you say it another way?" This question metacommunicates by letting the other person know you did not grasp her message and that you want to understand.

Effective metacommunication also helps friends and romantic partners express how they feel about their interactions. Linda Acitelli (1988, 1993) has studied

what happens when partners in a relationship talk to each other about how they perceive and feel about their interaction. She reports that women and men alike find metacommunication helpful if there is a conflict or problem that must be addressed. Both sexes seem to appreciate knowing how the other feels about their differences; they are also eager to learn how to communicate to resolve those differences. During a conflict, one person might say, "I feel like we're both being really stubborn. Do you think we could each back off a little from our positions?" This expresses discontent with how communication is proceeding and offers an alternative. After conflict, one partner might say, "This really cleared the air between us. I feel a lot better now."

I never feel like an argument is really over and settled until Andy and I have said that we feel better for having thrashed out whatever was the problem. It's like I want closure, and the fight isn't really behind us until we both say, "I'm glad we talked," or something to say what we went through led us to a better place.

Acitelli also found that women are more likely than men to appreciate metacommunication when there is no conflict or immediate problem to be resolved. For example, while curled up on a sofa and watching TV, a woman might say to her male partner, "I really feel comfortable snuggling with you." This statement comments on the relationship and the nonverbal communication between the couple. According to Acitelli and others (Wood, 1997), men generally find talk about relationships unnecessary unless there is an immediate problem to be addressed. Understanding this gender difference in preferences for metacommunication may help you interpret members of the other sex more accurately.

Principle 6: Interpersonal Communication Develops and Sustains Relationships

Interpersonal communication is the primary way we build, refine, and transform relationships. Partners talk to work out

Communication in Everyday Life

INSIGHT

Poor Interpersonal Communication as the Number One Cause of Divorce

According to a nationwide poll, a majority of people perceive communication problems as the number one reason marriages fail (Roper poll, 1999). Poll results showed that, regardless of age, race, sex, or income level, Americans reported that communication problems are the most common cause of divorce; 53% of those who were polled said that ineffective communication was the principal reason for divorce. Compare this with the frequency with which people named other causes of divorce: money problems, 29%; interference from family members, 7%; sexual problems, 5%; previous relationships, 3%; and children, 3%.

Conversely, good communication is at the core of healthy marriages according to marital therapists (Scarf, 2008). When cancer is diagnosed, marriage carries a strong advantage: Unmarried men have a 27% higher risk of death than their married counterparts. Unmarried women are 19% more likely to die than their married peers ("A Lifesaving Side to Marriage," 2016).

expectations and understandings of their interaction, appropriate and inappropriate topics and styles of communicating, and the nature of the relationship itself. Is it a friendship or a romantic relationship? How much and in what ways can we count on each other? How do we handle disagreements—by confronting them, ignoring them, or using indirect strategies to restore harmony? What are the bottom lines, the "thou shalt not" rules for what counts as unforgivable betrayal? What counts as caring—words, deeds, or both? Because communication has no intrinsic meanings, we must generate our own in the course of interaction.

Communication also allows us to construct or reconstruct individual and joint histories. For instance, when people fall in love, they often redefine former loves as "mere infatuations" or "puppy love," but definitely not the real thing. When something goes wrong in a relationship, partners may work together to define what happened in a way that allows them to continue. Marriage counselors report that couples routinely work out face-saving explanations for affairs so that they can stay together in the aftermath of infidelity (Scarf, 1987). Partners often talk about past events and experiences that challenged them and ones that were joyous. The process of reliving the past reminds partners how long they have been together and how much they have shared. As partners communicate thoughts and feelings, they generate shared meanings for themselves, their interaction, and their relationship.

Communication is also the primary means by which people construct a future for themselves and their relationships. For intimates, talking about a vision of a shared future is one of the most powerful ties that link people (Wood, 2006a). Romantic couples often dream together by talking about the family they plan and how they'll be in 20 years. Likewise, friends discuss plans for the future and promise reunions if they must move apart, and work colleagues talk about advancement and challenges down the road. Communication allows us to express and share dreams, imaginings, and memories, and to weave all of these into shared understandings of a continuing relationship.

I love talking about the future with my fiancé. Sometimes, we talk for hours about the kind of house we'll have and what our children will be like and how we'll juggle two careers and a family. I know everything won't work out exactly like we think now, but talking about it makes me feel so close to Dave and like our future is real.

Principle 7: Interpersonal Communication Is Not a Panacea

As we have seen, we communicate to satisfy many of our needs. Yet it would be a mistake to think communication is a cure-all. Many problems can't be solved by talk alone. Communication by itself won't end hunger, abuses of human rights around the globe, racism, intimate partner violence, homophobia, or physical diseases. Nor can words alone bridge irreconcilable differences between people or erase the hurt of betrayal. Although good communication may increase understanding and help us solve problems, it will not fix everything. We should also realize that the idea of talking things through is distinctly Western. Not all societies think it's wise or

useful to communicate about relationships or to talk extensively about feelings. Just as interpersonal communication has many strengths and values, it also has limits, and its effectiveness is shaped by cultural contexts.

Principle 8: Interpersonal Communication Effectiveness Can Be Learned

It is a mistake to think that effective communicators are born, that some people have a natural talent and others don't. Although some people have extraordinary talent in athletics or writing, even those who don't can learn to be competent athletes and writers. Likewise, some people have an aptitude for communicating, but all of us can become competent communicators. This book and the course you are taking should sharpen your understandings of how interpersonal communication works and should help you learn skills that will enhance your effectiveness in relating to others.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EVERYDAY LIFE

As in every chapter, we will explore how social media are relevant to the ideas presented in the foregoing pages. We discussed human needs that we satisfy through communication, and these are met by interaction on social media just as they are met by f2f interaction. For example, social networking sites are a major source for satisfying our needs for belonging and self-esteem. You might take a moment to reflect on the extent to which you rely on digital and online communication to meet physical, safety, belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs and to participate effectively in a diverse society.

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Consider what the definition of interpersonal communication implies for communication via social media. When we talk with people f2f, we are aware of their immediate physical context, which is not the case with much online and digital interaction. We may not know who else is present and what else is happening around a person we text. When the systems within which communication occurs are unknown to us, it's more difficult to interpret others. Also, because nonverbal communication is restricted online and especially digitally, we may miss out on meaning, particularly on the relationship level.

Our definition of interpersonal communication also emphasizes process—changes in communication that happen over time. Think about how online and digital communication have evolved in the course of the past two decades. When email first emerged, most people treated it much like letter writing: An email started with "Dear" or "Hello" and ended with a closing such as "Thank you" or "Sincerely." As email became more popular and as all of us were flooded with email messages, the opening and closing courtesies largely disappeared. As email traffic continued to increase, abbreviations started being used: BRB (be right back),

LOL (laughing out loud), and so forth. Texting brought more innovation in use of symbols. Vowels are often dropped, single letters serve for some words (u for you, r for are), and phrases are more acceptable than complete sentences. The rules of grammar, syntax, and spelling have been loosened for digital natives who are accustomed to the autocorrect function that is standard on most phones and computers.

Our definition of interpersonal communication also highlights meanings, which are at the heart of our interaction via social media. We blog and tweet to tell others what issues and events mean to us; we follow others' blogs and tweets to learn what they think. Emerging norms for using social media also challenge some long-standing meanings. For example, having dinner with others traditionally has meant interacting in a focused and continuous way with the people at the table; attending a meeting has meant being mentally present in the meeting. Yet people increasingly send or check texts during meals and meetings, which may mean they are partially present in multiple spaces, yet not fully present in any one.

Finally, think about how the eight principles of interpersonal communication apply to online and digital interaction. For instance, the principle that we cannot *not* communicate implies that just as texting friends is communication, so is *not* texting them. When we don't answer others' texts, they may interpret this as meaning we are angry or uninterested in them. Or consider the principle that interpersonal communication is irreversible. Have you ever sent a text or tweet and then regretted it but been unable to call it back? Have you ever wished you could erase some of your electronic footprints—embarrassing photos you posted years ago or flames that you regret? Our online and digital communication is irreversible, just as our f2f communication is.

A third principle is that interpersonal communication involves ethical choices. Important ethical issues infuse the online and digital world. Is it ethical to misrepresent yourself or your goals when creating your profile for an online dating site? Is exaggerating (saying you are 5'10" when you are really 5'8") unethical? What about flaming or cyberbullying and cyberstalking? How does the anonymity of much online communication affect the ethical (or unethical) choices people make? These are critical questions to keep in mind as you communicate interpersonally using social media. Continue this discussion by thinking about how the remaining five principles we discussed apply to interaction via social media.

GUIDELINES FOR INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

Sometimes we handle interactions well, and other times we don't. What are the differences between effective and ineffective communication? Scholars define **interpersonal communication competence** as the ability to communicate effectively, appropriately, and ethically. Effectiveness involves achieving the goals we have

for specific interactions. In different situations, your goals might be to explain an idea, to comfort a friend, to stand up for your position, to negotiate a raise, or to persuade someone to change behaviors. The more effectively you communicate, the more likely you are to be competent in achieving your goals.

Competence also emphasizes appropriateness. This means that competent communication is adapted to particular situations and people. Language that is appropriate at a party with friends may not be appropriate in a job interview. Appropriateness also involves contexts. It may be appropriate to kiss an intimate in a private setting but not in a classroom. Similarly, many people choose not to argue in front of others but prefer to engage in conflict when they are alone.

Five skills are closely tied to competence in interpersonal communication: (1) developing a range of communication skills, (2) adapting communication appropriately, (3) engaging in dual perspective, (4) monitoring communication, and (5) committing to ethical interpersonal communication. We'll discuss each of these skills now.

Develop a Range of Skills

No single style of communication is best in all circumstances, with all people, or for pursuing all goals. Because what is effective varies, we need to have a broad repertoire of communication behaviors. Consider the different skills needed for interpersonal communication competence in several situations.

To comfort someone, we need to be soothing and compassionate. To negotiate a good deal on a car, we need to be assertive and firm. To engage constructively in conflict, we need to listen and build a supportive climate. To support a friend who is depressed, we need to affirm that person, demonstrate that we care, and encourage the friend to talk about his or her problems. To build good work relationships, we need to communicate supportively, express our ideas clearly, and listen well. Because no single set of skills composes interpersonal communication competence, we need to learn a range of communicative abilities.

Adapt Communication Appropriately

The ability to communicate in a range of ways doesn't make us competent unless we also know which kinds of communication to use in specific interactions. For instance, knowing how to be both assertive and deferential isn't useful unless we can figure out when each style of communication is appropriate. Although there is no neat formula for adapting communication appropriately, it's generally important to consider personal goals, context, and the people with whom we communicate.

Your goals for communication are a primary guideline for selecting appropriate behaviors. If your purpose in a conversation is to give emotional support to someone, then it isn't effective to talk at length about your own experiences. On the other hand, if you want someone to understand you better, talking in depth about your life may be highly effective. If your goal is to win an argument and get your way, it may be competent to assert your point of view, point out flaws in your

partner's ideas, and refuse to compromise. If you want to work through conflict in a way that doesn't harm a relationship, however, other communication choices might be more constructive.

For most of my life, I wasn't at all assertive, even when I should have been. Last spring, though, I was so tired of having people walk all over me that I signed up for a workshop on assertiveness training. I learned how to assert myself, and I was really proud of how much more I would stand up for myself. The problem was that I did it all the time, regardless of whether something really mattered enough to be assertive. Just like I was always passive before, now I'm always assertive. I need to figure out a better way to balance my behaviors.

Context is another influence on decisions of when, how, and about what to communicate. It is appropriate to ask your doctor about symptoms during an office exam, but it isn't appropriate to do so when you see the doctor in a social situation. When a friend is feeling low, that's not a good time to criticize, although at another time, criticism might be constructive. Sometimes in-person communication is more appropriate than texting or emailing. When communicating online, it's useful to compensate for the lack of nonverbal cues by adding emoticons and expressing warmth explicitly.

Remembering Buber's discussion of the I–Thou relationship, we know it is important to adapt what we say and how we say it to particular people. As we have seen, interpersonal communication increases our knowledge of others. Thus, the more interpersonal the relationship, the more we can adapt our communication to unique partners. Abstract communicative goals, such as supporting others, call for distinct behaviors in regard to specific people. What feels supportive to one friend may not to another. One of my closest friends feels attacked if I challenge her ideas, yet another friend relishes challenges and the discussions they prompt. What is effective in talking with them varies. We have to learn what our intimates need, what upsets and pleases them, and how they interpret various kinds of communication. Scholars use the term **person-centeredness** to refer to the ability to adapt messages effectively to particular people (Bernstein, 1974; Burleson, 1987). Appropriately adapted communication, then, is sensitive to goals, contexts, and other people.

Engage in Dual Perspective

Central to competent interpersonal communication is the ability to engage in **dual perspective**, which is understanding both our own and another person's perspective, beliefs, thoughts, or feelings (Phillips & Wood, 1983). When we adopt dual perspective, we understand how someone else thinks and feels about issues. To meet another person in genuine dialogue, we must be able to realize how that person views himself or herself, the situation, and his or her own thoughts and feelings. We may personally see things much differently, and we may want to express our perceptions. Yet we also need to understand and respect the other person's perspective.

Research (Tomasello, 2009) shows that the tendency to try to understand and help others may be innate in humans. Infants as young as 14 months old offer to

pick up an object dropped by an adult not related to them (Wade, 2009). This innate tendency to reach out to others thrives when it is nurtured by adults around a child.

People who cannot take the perspectives of others are egocentric. They impose their perceptions on others and interpret others' experiences through their own eyes. Consider an example. Roberto complains that he is having trouble writing a report for his supervisor. His coworker Raymond responds, "All you have to do is outline the plan and provide the rationale. That's a snap." "But," says Roberto, "I've always had trouble writing. I just go blank when I sit down to write." Raymond says, "That's silly. Anyone can do this. It just took me an hour or so to do my report." Raymond has failed to understand how Roberto perceives writing. If you have trouble writing, then composing a report isn't a snap, but Raymond can't get beyond his own comfort with writing to understand Roberto's different perspective.

Sometimes it's very difficult for me to understand my daughter. She likes music that sounds terrible to me, and I don't like the way she dresses sometimes. For a long time, I judged her by my own values about music and dress, but that really pushed us apart. She kept saying, "I'm not you. Why can't you look at it from my point of view?" Finally, I heard her, and now we both try to understand each other's point of view. It isn't always easy, but you can't have a relationship on just one person's terms.

As Asha says, engaging in dual perspective isn't necessarily easy, because all of us naturally see things from our own points of view and in terms of our own experiences. Parents often have trouble understanding the perspectives of children, particularly teenagers (Fox & Frankel, 2005). Yet we can improve our ability to engage in dual perspective (Greene & Burleson, 2003). The following three guidelines can help you increase your ability to take the perspective of others:

- First, be aware of the tendency to see things only from your own perspective, and resist that inclination.
- Second, listen closely to how others express their thoughts and feelings, so you gain clues of what things mean to them and how they feel.
- Third, ask others to explain how they feel, what something means to them, or how they perceive a situation. Asking questions and probing for details communicate on the relationship level that you are interested and that you want to understand.

Making a commitment to engage in dual perspective and practicing the three guidelines just discussed will enhance your ability to recognize and respond to others' perspectives.

Monitor Your Communication

The fourth ability that affects interpersonal communication competence is **monitoring**, which is the capacity to observe and regulate your own communication. Most of us do this much of the time without even thinking about it. Before bringing up a touchy topic, you remind yourself not to get defensive and not to get pulled

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into counterproductive arguing. During the discussion, Chris says something that upsets you. You think of a really good zinger but stop yourself from saying it because you don't want to hurt Chris. In each instance, you monitored your communication.

Monitoring occurs both before and during interaction. Often, before conversations we indicate to ourselves what we do and don't want to say. During communication, we stay alert and edit our thoughts before expressing them. Online communication offers us especially effective ways to monitor our communication. We can save messages, reread them to see if they express what we really intend, and edit them before sending or posting. Our ability to monitor allows us to adapt communication in advance and gauge our effectiveness as we interact.

Of course, we don't monitor all the time. When we are with people who understand us or when we are talking about unimportant topics, we don't necessarily need to monitor communication with great care. Sometimes, however, not monitoring can result in communication that hurts others or that leads us to regard ourselves negatively. In some cases, failure to monitor results from getting caught up in the dynamics of interaction. We simply forget to keep a watchful eye on ourselves, and so we say or do things we later regret. In addition, some people have poorly developed monitoring skills. They have a limited awareness of how they come across to others. Communication competence involves learning to attend to feedback from others and to monitor the impact of our communication as we interact with them.

Commit to Ethical Communication

The final requirement for interpersonal competence is commitment to ethical communication. This commitment requires that you invest energy in communicating ethically with others as unique human beings both f2f and on social media. This implies that you can't treat others as merely members of some group, such as men, coworkers, or customers. Responding to another as a unique and valuable person also means you can't dismiss the other person's feelings as wrong, inappropriate, or silly. Instead, you must honor the person and the feelings he or she expresses, even if you feel differently.

A commitment to ethical communication also requires you to respect yourself and your ideas and feelings. Just as you must honor those of others, you must respect yourself and your own perspective. Finally, ethical communicators are committed to the integrity of the communication process itself. They realize that it is interactive and always evolving, and they are willing to deal with that complexity. In addition, they are sensitive to multiple levels of meaning and to the irreversibility of communication. Commitment, then, is vital to relationships, other people, ourselves, and communication.

In sum, interpersonal communication competence is the ability to communicate in ways that are effective and appropriate. The five requirements for competence are (1) developing a range of communication skills; (2) adapting them appropriately to goals,

others, and situations; (3) engaging in dual perspective; (4) monitoring communication and its impact; and (5) committing to ethical interpersonal communication. Consider which aspects of communication competence you would most like to improve, and make a contract with yourself to work on them during this course.

INTERACTIVE VIDEO ACTIVITY

Continuing the Conversation

MindTap®

Watch the video and do the Interactive Video Activity.

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When you've watched the video online, critique and analyze this encounter based on the principles you learned in this chapter. Then compare your work with the author's suggested responses. Online, even more videos will let you continue the conversation with your instructor.

> Your supervisor asks you to mentor a new employee, Toya. After 2 weeks, you perceive that the new person is responsible and punctual, and takes initiative. At the same time, you realize that Toya is careless about details. You've also noted that she seems insecure and wants a lot of affirmation and praise. You want to give her honest feedback so she can improve her performance, yet you are afraid she will react defensively. You ask her to meet with you to discuss her first 2 weeks.

You: How are you liking the job?

Toya: I like it a lot, and I'm trying to do my best. Nobody has said anything, so I guess I'm okay.

You: I've noted how responsible you are.

Toya: Thanks. So I guess I'm doing okay?

You: What if someone suggested that there are ways you can improve?

Toya: What do you mean? Nobody's said anything to me.

1. What would you say next to Toya? How would you meet your ethical responsibilities as her mentor and also adapt to her interpersonal needs for reassurance?
2. What is your ethical responsibility to Toya, your supervisor, and the company? Reflect thoughtfully about potential tensions among these responsibilities.
3. How would your communication differ if you acted according to a linear or transactional model of communication?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, we launched our study of interpersonal communication. We began by noting that communicating with others allows us to meet basic needs for survival and safety as well as more abstract human needs for inclusion, esteem, self-actualization, and effective participation in a socially diverse world. We then defined interpersonal communication and considered different models of the process.

We discussed eight principles of interpersonal communication. First, it is impossible not to communicate. Whether or not we intend to send certain messages and whether or not others understand our meanings, communication always occurs when people are together. Second, communication is irreversible because we cannot unsay or undo what passes between ourselves and others. Third, interpersonal communication always has ethical implications. Fourth, meanings reside not in words alone but rather in how we interpret them. Fifth, metacommunication affects meanings in interpersonal interaction. Sixth, we use communication to develop and sustain relationships. In fact, communication is essential to relationships because it is in the process of interacting with others that we develop expectations, understandings, and rules to guide relationships. Seventh, although communication is powerful and important, it is not a cure-all. Eighth, effectiveness in interpersonal communication can be learned through committed study and practice of principles and skills. We noted that the foundations of communication discussed in the chapter are relevant to digital and online communication. We also discussed how the foregoing ideas are relevant to digital communication.

Competent interpersonal communicators interact in ways that are effective, appropriate, and ethical. This means that we should adapt our ways of communicating to specific goals, situations, and others. Effectiveness and appropriateness require us to recognize and respect differences that reflect personal and cultural backgrounds. Guidelines for doing this include developing a range of communication skills, adapting communication sensitively, engaging in dual perspective, monitoring our own communication, and committing to effective and ethical interpersonal communication. In later chapters, we focus on developing the skills that enhance interpersonal communication competence.

Flashcards and Chapter Quiz

MindTap®

Practice defining the chapter's terms by using online flashcards and complete the Chapter Quiz.

content meaning 24
dual perspective 38
ethics 30
feedback 28
I-It communication 19
interactive models 28
interpersonal communication 21
interpersonal communication competence 36
I-Thou communication 20
I-You communication 20
linear models 27
metacommunication 32
model 26
monitoring 39
noise 21
person-centeredness 38
process 22
relationship meaning 25
symbols 31
systemic 21
transactional model 28